

**J-KEY INPUT FOR COMPUTER SYSTEMS****Abstract of the Invention**

Information elements such as alphanumeric characters are input into a small computing device having little or no keyboard by operating with a predetermined number of strokes on a multi-directional input key, such as a joystick, input button or pointing button. Each direction of movement of the input key provides a input choice for a user allowing the user to make a sequence of choices through a hierarchy of selectable information elements. The sequence of strokes in the predetermined number of strokes is detected to identify the information element selected. A display provides information to the user indicating the information elements or characters available and the pattern of strokes to select a particular character. In some implementations of the invention the entire key stroke pattern is displayed. In other implementations of the invention, the display provides guidance before each stroke to indicate the key stroke choices available to select subsets of the information elements.